



***Division of Public Defender Services
State of Connecticut***

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COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
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TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE RAPILLO
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RAISED BILL 5567, AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports passage of ***Raised Bill 5567, An Act Concerning Children's Mental Health***. This proposal would establish a comprehensive children's mental health plan to identify and manage mental health needs in children under the age of eighteen. Like *Raised Bill 169, An Act Concerning the Assessment and Delivery of Mental Health Services for Children*, this proposal would focus on our schools. ***Raised Bill 5567*** would create social and emotional development guidelines for elementary schools to better identify children with emerging mental health needs. It also mandates educational standards for high schools. As part of this comprehensive plan, state agencies would be required to develop plans for intervention, prevention and treatment of childhood mental health issues.

Connecticut must do a better job identifying behavioral, educational and mental health issues in children. It makes sense to spend time creating useful guidelines for school professionals. Teachers, administrators and school staff are in the best position to observe a child and have the training to first identify an emerging need or issue. Developing a comprehensive plan will ensure that every school and state agency are working together. Collaboration will ensure that the guidelines and services developed will be appropriate, easy to access and streamlined. Although this proposal will come with a financial cost, the future cost of doing nothing will greatly exceed any dollars spent today. The Office of Chief Public Defender fully supports this proposal.